

HITLER AND THE WAR

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Dr. Rauschning was for years in the inner circle of Hitler's collaborators, entrusted with the important post of President of the Senate of Danzig. His opportunities for learning the Führer's startling plans and dreams for the future beyond this war were intimate and extensive. With his book The Revolution of Nihilism Dr. Rauschning has established himself as the foremost interpreter of Hitler's mind. The author is now in voluntary exile.

I KNOW Hitler's intentions out of his own mouth. Years ago he admitted with cynical frankness all those things which are now shaping into reality. He sketched his world-revolutionary alliance with Soviet Russia, the projected destruction of France, the breaking up of the British Empire, his designs upon the American hemisphere, his march into colonial areas. We who heard his intimate conversations in those years could not help taking them for the ravings of a megalomaniac.

Yet what seemed impossible then today hovers on the edge of fulfillment. I can, therefore, picture the consequences of a complete and overwhelming Hitler victory. This victory would mean the subversion of all established human relations. Not only would all political frontiers be mapped anew, but the foundations of human society would be turned upside down. The ensuing National Socialist world revolution would shatter everything, down to the deepest and most inti-

mate aspects of human life. Nothing would be spared that has given meaning to human existence.

When I alluded, two years ago, to the danger of an alliance between National Socialist Germany and Bolshevik Russia, people shook their heads unbelievably and pointed to the political aims outlined in *Mein Kampf*. Was not the East the direction Hitler's ambitions had chosen? But those of us close to him knew that Hitler was interested neither in the Ukraine nor in Danzig, nor even in Greater Germany as such. He was, and remains, interested solely in world revolution: the total re-ordering of life on this globe in accordance with his own visions. Whether the revolution started in the East or in the West, and how it would be promoted, depended only on the political situation and opportunities.

What Hitler craves is domination; exclusive world domination. He may be coldly calculating and even superior to other statesmen in the management of separate phases of his struggle. But he is altogether fantastic and obsessed, the creature of a fixed idea, as regards the greater goal of his life's work. He believes the German people have been destined for world domination. And he believes with a profound religious fervor that it is

his mission to lead his people to that destiny. It is a matter of indifference to him whether in the process he squanders the life-blood of the German people. He sees only the choice between an insignificant Germany and Germany the authoritarian World-Nation of the coming era. My indications of the consequences of a Hitler triumph, if they sound extravagant, should therefore be considered in the light of Hitler's paranoiac zeal.

The present war, in the Hitler view, is not a final event. It is one of a series of wars and uprisings in which no corner of the world will be spared by the internal and external blows of this revolutionary dynamism. Not even America is safe from Hitler's threat. In 1933 I dined at Hitler's table and heard his views on the United States. He began with the idea that, owing to its great social antagonisms, the United States was on the verge of a bloody revolution. He intimated that it would be easy for him actually to stir up this revolution or to stimulate its outbreak. Then the United States would never again be in a position to help the Western democracies of Europe.

Hitler went still further: National Socialism and its Führer had the mission of making a real nation out of America's conglomeration of

racism. He, Hitler, would take over and continue "Washington's task" and transform a corrupt moneyed democracy into a true people's democracy. At the same time the "German character" of the United States would be re-established. All the German blood that has streamed into America would wake up to its origin. North America would become a German state, closely connected with the German Empire in Europe. Fantastic? Not in the Führer's conversation.

Mexico, too, plays a part in Hitler's amazing scheme. Sir Henri Deterding, of the Royal Dutch Shell, had impressed upon him that Mexico was the richest country with the most incompetent and corrupt population of the world. German blood and German efficiency would therefore develop that country on a gigantic scale. That is why, years ago, Hitler's agents and Storm Troopers were sent to Mexico for a psychological war. The same was done to South America. Those who conceive of Hitler as merely interested in Southeastern Europe make a grave mistake. The creation of a Greater Germany and of a European-Asiatic Continental empire are only preliminary stages leading to world authority. His Greater Germany, the nucleus of his power,

Hitler created without a war. The help of the Western European democracies had made it easier for him to call into existence the big power bloc of 80,000,000. Their hope that they might thus induce Hitler to take the road of peace proved a delusion. The creation of that bloc was not the end of a national-revolutionary movement; it was the beginning of a world-revolutionary campaign. Hitler now had the base for the second phase. He never swerved from his main idea, that there was only one way for Germany to remain alive — by dominating Europe, and ultimately the world.

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Two roads point to that Nazi Empire. One goes by way of the assimilation of Central and Southeastern Europe and to the goal of breaking up Russia. This is the old plan conceived by General Ludendorff: to create a chain of small vassal states under Germany's control. The Baltic countries, Poland, the Danube countries, and the Balkans; also the Ukraine, the Volga region, and Georgia in the Caucasus, which were to be separated from Russia — all these were to constitute a federation of states in which Germany alone would

command the army, guide the foreign policy; and determine the economic life. This, one might say, is the classical Eastern policy of National Socialism, as conceived by Alfred Rosenberg, Joseph Goebbels, and Hitler himself.

In the West this policy implies the crushing of France, with the annexation of its northern section, of Alsace-Lorraine, and of old Burgundy — that is, the territory west of Belfort. But the reduction of France to a small power is not the only Nazi war aim in the West. In addition to the Eastern Federation of States, there is to be a similar federation in the West and in the North. Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, as well as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, are to submit to German leadership on the same terms as the small East European states. They have to cease to be independent states. They are to enter into the *Befehlsraum*, the "commanding sphere," of Greater Germany, as the new expression has it. They may be permitted to keep some measure of autonomy. But their economy, politics, and social system would be determined by Germany, by National Socialism. Most important, the French, Dutch, and Belgian colonies would be taken over by Germany.

In Hitler's opinion this gigantic plan could not be carried out at one blow. By a series of separate actions Germany could approach this aim so closely that eventually one final victorious war would secure its complete realization. These fevered ideas of a great European Empire occupied Hitler's mind as early as 1933-1934, when the fear of sanctions by the Western powers still hovered as a possibility over Germany. Even at that early period it was his determination either to attack France first or to turn against the East. "Will Poland remain neutral if I attack the West?" was the first question which Hitler put to me when I reported to him about an interview with Marshal Pilsudski of Poland. Then he expounded to me his aims in the East, which went even farther than those which I have just outlined. He added that he would be pleased, of course, if he could carry out his Eastern policy *with* the help of Poland rather than *against* Poland. At that time he presented to me plans similar to those which Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop put years later to Polish Minister Beck: a joint German-Polish attack on Russia.

Besides this "classic" dream, however, there is another. It likewise contemplates domination over

Europe as a step towards world control. But the road it envisages is diametrically opposite. Its basic strategy is an alliance, rather than a conflict, with Russia. Hitler talked to me at length about this idea. Nothing, he indicated in effect, would prevent him from reversing his course — at a moment's notice, if necessary — and marching with the Russians instead of against them.

There has been from the beginning in the National Socialist Party a group favoring close alliance with Soviet Russia. This idea found wide support in influential circles outside the Nazi Party, and even among groups opposed to it. Their view broke sharply with the traditional conceptions of European middle-class nationalism. It started with the necessity of creating a politically, socially, and economically uniform giant empire from Vlissingen (Flushing) to Vladivostok; that is, from the North Sea to the Pacific. It insisted upon the need to create this continental line as the foundation for a new world order — not through war, but through an alliance with Russia. After all, the advocates of this scheme said, it mattered little whether the vast empire was National Socialist or Bolshevik. The differences were, in their opinion,

of no importance as against the larger world-revolutionary tasks of rational economic planning, of creating the new social order, and a "just" redistribution of the world's wealth. It was not of such paramount importance, in the end, whether Germans or Russians would come out on top in this close symbiosis of Germany and Russia. What really mattered was the finish of the democratic order, free economy, and capitalism.

Though he did not accept these ideas, Hitler never rejected them. He countenanced their advocacy in the Party by a number of regional leaders, such as Herr Koch of Eastern Prussia or Herr Kaufmann of Hamburg. He reserved for himself the right to switch to the second road of his revolution whenever he saw fit. One may ask whether the German-Russian pact and other things pointing in the same direction represent stages along this path towards world domination through an alliance of these two world revolutionary dictatorships.

I think I know Hitler's intentions sufficiently well to be able to state that this isn't the case. Hitler plays a false but bold game. His alliance with Bolshevism is only a tactical expedient. In due time he will abandon his alliance with Rus-

sia just as he dropped his pact with Poland. Before this happens, however, he expects to win a decisive victory over France and bring about the isolation of England.

I had occasion to speak with Hitler several times on matters touching upon his Russian policy. In 1934 he suggested to me that I go to Russia and make connections. Actually the connections of the National Socialist Party with Soviet Russia had never been broken off. Hitler discussed the difficulties. He railed at the Bolsheviki as "Jewish masters of chicanery"; the Bolsheviki always wanted to get a complete hold of you, he said. No alliance of equal partners was possible with them: there was only domination or submission. He hinted that in case of an alliance with Russia he faced the danger of dealing with an adversary who was superior to him in the domain of domestic policy. And he explained to me that he was ready to do anything, even to conclude an alliance with Russia, if this should improve Germany's position. But such an alliance would never prevent him from eventually reverting to his real aim — the conquest or dismemberment of Russia.

Thus, what is going on now is merely a tactical move. It is a joint action offering advantages to

both partners. Who could deny that the Soviet Union is now in the process of improving its strategical and military-geographical position with regard to Germany? And who could deny that Germany's position has been weakened owing to Russia's westward advance? Hitler is ready to put up with this as the temporary price for conquering the European West and securing his rear during the present war. He intended to achieve this by attempting to win Poland over to an alliance or to a neutral position. He believes he has achieved it now through an alliance with Russia. And after conquering the West he will again turn his face to the East. Then, having obtained a broad continental basis in Northern Asia at Russia's expense, Hitler will take up the final destruction of the Anglo-Saxon powers — that is, the annihilation of the British Empire and the occupation of the United States, which in the meantime will have become exhausted by domestic revolutions. With the gigantic fleet to be constructed in subsequent years, he would enter the final phase of his policy: the achievement of world hegemony.

Such is Hitler's obsession, far-fetched though it must sound to any who have not experienced the man's unlimited megalomania.

III

I have repeatedly heard Hitler himself expand upon his social ideas, and there has hardly been a ruler in modern times who has held the masses in such cynical contempt. Once, during a conversation in the innermost circle about the German policy in the East, I heard him explain what seemed to him particularly important in the acquisition of a free "living space." It was the "social system," the way of life foreseen by National Socialism. No civilization, Hitler said, can exist without a foundation of slavery.

New forms of slavery must be evolved, he said. From time immemorial the subjected races, the prisoners of war, were the slaves of the conquerors. In the future, subjected nationalities constitute the lowest class of society. Their task would be to perform unskilled work in the industries and in the fields. They would have no rights.

Yes, he declaimed, we should have the courage to admit the advantages of illiteracy. A stop should be put to the talk about the ideal of public education for all. Science and education are weapons of domination. There should be no free access to them, except for the benefit of privileged groups. Above

this conquered mass of laborers there is to rise the class of Germans and German allies who would supply the skilled workers, the industrial managers and the government functionaries. These, in turn, would have above them the privileged class of National Socialist Party members, and it is out of their ranks that the revolutionary army is to be recruited. Finally, the whole edifice would be crowned by the new nobility, the National Socialist elite, forming a select group of masters, who alone would enjoy full liberty and a monopoly of power.

Summed up, these ideas may appear rank insanity. Yet they are the motivating intentions of the Nazis, and the attempt to carry them out will be made if Hitler wins. They are being put in practice wherever Hitler does win. The Czechs and the Poles are treated as virtual slaves. Their fate is shared by those Germans who oppose the regime. Forced-labor camps will become permanent and essential institutions in the new world-wide social system. Privileged groups among Party members and the National Socialist elite have already set themselves apart as a new ruling nobility, exempt from all middle-class tenets of honor and ethics.

What Hitler has in mind goes back to alleged historical experience. He makes it his peculiar ambition to carry out consciously what in former historical crises transpired of itself. "Yes, we are barbarians" he told me once. "It is our duty to break into the decaying, democratic world, just as the Germanic barbarians broke into the ancient Roman Empire. And it is in the midst of combats and destruction that we will create a new civilization." Such a will, consciously, almost zealously cruel, and dedicated to the destruction of that which exists, recognizes neither humanity, morality, nor inherent rights. "We must be cruel" is another saying of Hitler's, which he frequently uses — in the circle of his closest associates.

Hitler's victory would plunge the whole world into savagery. It would spell a breakdown of all political and spiritual traditions beyond anything experienced in the eight or ten thousand years of our history. It is easy to predict what would happen in the political field. Europe, from the Atlantic coast to the Pripet marshes in Poland and to the Black Sea — perhaps even beyond that, to the Urals or to the Pacific — will constitute a single territory subjected to National Socialism. Not

only would this subjugated area lose its independence and its specific forms of sovereignty, but National Socialist philosophy would be imposed. Brutal compulsion, terror, lies, spies, and informers would strangle all personal life. Hundreds of millions would deliberately be reduced to the hopelessness of a semi-animal existence. With cold, cruel calculation millions of humans would be slowly tortured to death. Vast territories would be turned into an enormous workshop, turning out war material on a still more gigantic scale for the final conquest of the world.

Science and art, both being unthinkable without the liberty of creative effort, will dry up and die. A few years ago the aged German physicist, Dr. Planck, spoke to me sadly of the ease with which the most vital threads of an intellectual community could be broken. The creative force of our civilization lives in a few thousand men with the highest intellectual accomplishments. They are in the possession of the invaluable experience of millenniums of intellectual work. If that intellectual continuum should break, we are beyond salvation, doomed to revert to the darkness of barbarism. Nor will it be possible to reproduce the external technical improve-

ments of our life for any length of time if the scientific achievements upon which they are based can no longer be maintained.

It is easy, as I said, to foresee the political and territorial consequences of a Hitler victory. It is not so easy for the modern mind to envisage the whole deep horror of its moral and social consequences. Europe has again and again been shaken by invasions of barbarians who were either driven back eventually, or assimilated. Today the invasion is from within, not from without. And the will-to-

destruction now has at its disposal technical means which external barbarians never possessed. Far more fearful than the annihilation of human life and cities will be the invisible destruction, the shattering of moral concepts. Already the world feels the contagious effects of a "realism" whose motto is "That which is useful is right." Hitler has destroyed right as an independent human category. In his own country he has deprived the population of all civil rights. He will recognize no right what~~ever~~ if he wins.

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